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GROU

CHARACTERISTICS

OF

TRUE DEVOTION

By Jean Nicolas Grou.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HIDDEN LIFE OF THE SOUL," "SPIRITUAL MAXIMS," ETC.

Translated from the French

NEW YORK
THOMAS WHITTAKER
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PREFACE.

THOSE who are familiar with "The Hidden Life of the Soul," "The Science of the Cross," and "The Spiritual Maxims," will gladly hail another work by the same author.

"The Spiritual Maxims," recently published in London, were written as a continuation or supplement to this work, the "Characteristics of True Devotion;" and in the closing chapter the author speaks of his purpose and intention of writing it.

This is so eminently practical, and so perfectly adapted to all classes of Christians, it is hoped it will meet with the hearty approval its great merit deserves. For daily devotional reading it is very earnest and searching, and cannot fail to enrich and stimulate those who are endeavoring to lead a higher spiritual life.

In all Père Grou's writings there is a remarkable simplicity and directness; and they are so saturated with the mind and heart of Christ that no one can read them without feeling that the Christian life is a very real and a very great thing, and by no means an easy thing, and that love and humility are its foundation-stones.

In these religious works there is in the French a certain intensity of expression which is necessarily lost in the translation; but the translator of this little work has faithfully sought to catch the spirit of the author, and to reproduce it as closely as was possible in the cooler English tongue. A few passages, which seemed only adapted to the religious, and in no way suited to the secular, she has taken the liberty to omit. Trusting that her humble labor may be blessed, and that this little book may be the means of leading many souls up to a truer and higher devotion, she commends it to all earnest Christian readers.

ELLEN M. FOGG.

New York City,
Easter, 1882.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF TRUE DEVOTION.

CHAPTER I.

Preliminary Advice.

NOTWITHSTANDING the general coldness of piety, there are many people who profess much devotion. Few, however, have any true idea of it. The majority follow their own prejudices with regard to it, or their imagination, or their inclination, or their self-love. Hence arise those innumerable faults to which the devout of both sexes, of every age, of every condition and every state, are subject. These faults are not, indeed, such as to endanger salvation; but

they hinder perfection, and place obstacles in the way of holiness. To the worldly they become an occasion of ridicule and blasphemy; to the weak, a subject of scandal; to ordinary Christians, a pretext which encourages them in carelessness, and deters them from embracing the devout life. How important, then, for pious souls, awake to the glory of God and their own interests, to conceive, according to the gospel, a correct idea of devotion, and to express it in their conduct!

I propose to draw for them a faithful picture of devotion in this little work. I invite them to observe all its features with an attentive eye, and then to cast a look upon themselves. Self-love is so blind, the human will so weak, that I dare not hope they will draw from this comparison all the advantage that should properly result from it. Either they do not see themselves just as they are, or a

nature, takes away from many the courage and even the desire to reform; or perhaps they find the model too perfect, and, in despair of attaining to it, they do not even try to approach it. However it may be, I shall esteem myself too happy if even a very few profit by these instructions. Besides, I am not writing for devout people only. Many Christians hesitate to enter upon the religious life, and an open profession of such piety as involves entire self-renunciation. This writing may perhaps be the means which God will employ to lead them and establish them irrevocably in the better way. Every day some sinners return to God. They have hitherto been ignorant of his service; and they will now be glad to be instructed by a little book, the reading of which will require but a few hours. Finally, the young, who are beginning to consecrate themselves to God, long habit, become almost a part of their

need to be enlightened, and to learn the true way which leads to him. As they have no prejudices to combat, nor bad habits to correct, it will be sufficient to point out to them the way, that they may enter upon it, and thus be preserved from all the irregularities and all the imperfections of a devotion misapprehended. It is to them that I especially recommend the reading of this book. Those who have charge of their education may put it into their hands when they consider them able to understand and to profit by it; that is, at an age when mind and heart are sufficiently developed. Earlier than that I do not think it would be well to let them read it. The first impression is always the most important for the good or evil effect of a work of piety; for, if it fail then, one rarely returns to it later. Therefore it is better to wait till the young mind is so matured as to receive a deep and lasting impression.

CHAPTER II.

What is True Devotion?

WHAT is devotion? Each one defines it in his own way. For a worldling, it is to believe in God, and to have some religious principle. For a saint, it is to be absorbed and lost in God. Between these two extremes there is an almost infinite number of degrees, more or less just according as they are near to the one, or removed from the other. If we would define it exactly, let us look at the word itself. It is derived from the Latin, and means a vowing or consecration, — in short, a giving up. For a person to be devoted, then. is the same thing as to be given up, or vowed, or consecrated to God. It is upon this idea which the term "devotion"

presents to the mind that I shall establish all I have to say upon the subject I have undertaken to treat, premising that, so far as devotion relates to us and to our duty to God, it must be taken in its broadest and most serious sense. We have no stronger word in our language than that of "devotion" to mark intimate attachment, absolute and voluntary dependence, affectionate zeal, — in short, a disposition to submit one's self wholly to the will of another, to anticipate his desires, to study his interests, and to sacrifice all for him. It is thus one speaks of a child, a servant, or a subject, who is devoted to his father, his master, or his king. We say, also, that a man is devoted to ambition, or to some other passion, when he thinks of nothing but to satisfy it, and seeks every means to that end ; when he gives to it all his thoughts, and is so absorbed in it that he can hardly occupy himself with any other object. Devotion to God comprises

all this in the highest degree; and it is, over and above this, a consecration, by virtue of which the person consecrated is no longer his own, — has no right over himself; but belongs, by an act of religion the most holy and irrevocable, to the Supreme Being. The practice of devotion has, I admit, its beginning, its progress, and its perfection; but the act of devotion must be full, entire, and perfect in the will at the moment it is formed. Without proceeding further, and upon this simple definition, one can already judge how rare devotion is among Christians, and whether one is one's self devoted.

CHAPTER III.

What we devote to God. The Motives of our Devotion.

THE devotion which we owe to God is an entire and complete self-surrender. It is founded upon the titles which belong only to him, and which he cannot share with any created being. God is our beginning and our end. He has created us, and he preserves us every moment. We owe to him every thing we possess, both physical and mental: the heavens, the earth, and all we enjoy are the works of his hands, and the gifts of his beneficence. He disposes all events according to his will, and his Providence has no other end in its designs and arrangements than our good. He has

created us to know him, to love him, to serve him, and thereby to merit the possession of him eternally. Enriched as we were in the beginning with every blessing of nature and of grace, a lasting felicity was attached for us to the observance of a very simple, just, and easy command. But, fallen as we are from that supernatural state by the disobedience of our first parents, God has re-established us in it by a wonderful device of his love; giving us his own Son, and laying upon him our sins, that through Jesus Christ he might restore to us his grace. To the general blessing of redemption he joins particular blessings, — a rebirth by baptism into the bosom of the Catholic Church, a good Christian education, many graces of preservation, many sins pardoned, many tender reproaches, and secret invitations to return to him, — in short, many tokens of special kindness. God is our sovereign good, — to

speak justly, our only good. As we have received every thing from him, we also expect every thing from him, and can be happy only through him. He is our King, our Lawgiver, our Benefactor, the Supreme Arbiter of our destiny. Add to this what he is in himself, the eternity and infinity of his being, and his perfections. Above all this, consider what he is in the person of Jesus Christ. Stop now a moment; reflect upon each one of these points which I have only alluded to; think of it in all its force; estimate it in all its value; appreciate the duties and the affections it demands of you, and the obligations it imposes upon you. After having considered each separately, combine them, and conceive, if you can, the immense extent of their united claims upon you. Measure the capacity of your heart; see, if even it should exhaust itself in respect, in love, in gratitude, in submission, it could ever acquit

itself of its obligations to God. Judge if your devotion, how far soever you may be able to carry it, will ever be proportioned to these many and great requirements.

CHAPTER IV.

All Other Devotion should be Subordinate to that which we owe to God.

THAT all other duties, even the most legitimate, cannot enter into comparison with this, is obvious. Moreover, every affection which may be opposed to it, which may give it the slightest injury, which will not be entirely subordinated to it, is an evil which God must necessarily condemn and punish. The homage, the respect, the love, the obedience, which we render to any creature whatsoever, are just, and approved of God, only as he commands and authorizes them; only as they are held within the limits he has prescribed; only as they are related to him, and are the

expression of the supreme homage, the infinite respect, the unbounded love, the implicit obedience, which are due to him alone. The true Christian should know only one single devotion, of which all others are but the extension and the application; namely, that which belongs to God. He should consecrate to him his mind, his heart, his body: he should breathe, he should think, and he should act, only for him. God is the principle, the motive, and the end of all the duties he fulfils to all his fellow-beings.

CHAPTER V.

The First Object of our Devotion should be the Glory of God, and the Accomplishment of his Will.

THE first and great object of devotion or piety is the glory of God, and the accomplishment of his will. God has not proposed to himself any other end in all his works, and he does not permit the Christian to do so; rather, he positively forbids him to substitute any other. We exist only to glorify God, and we glorify him only by loving him and obeying him. This glory of God should hold the first place in our thoughts and in our desires: it should be the great motive of all our actions. Every other intention, however good, however holy,

should only occupy the second place in our hearts. It is this which Jesus Christ teaches us in the prayer he has given us. The first petitions which compose it relate only to God and the interests of his glory. *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name:* let all reasonable beings praise thee, adore thee, and strive to imitate thy holiness; let them follow thee, endeavoring to be holy because thou art holy, and perfect as thou art perfect; and thus may thy name be hallowed in them and by them. *Thy kingdom come:* let all acknowledge thee their only Sovereign; let them establish thee the absolute Master of their hearts, and implore thee to exercise supreme dominion over them. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* Saints and angels know no other law than thy will: it is the principle of the order, the peace, and the love which reign among them; and it is all their happiness to

fulfil it. Let it be the same here below among men: let them use their liberty, not only in submitting to thy laws, but also in yielding to thy good pleasure, and to the dispensations of thy divine providence. Such should be the most sincere and the most earnest vows of true devotion. Are they ours? Are our lips and our heart united in offering them daily? Do our motives and our actions correspond to the fervor of our prayer?

CHAPTER VI.

The Second Object of Man's Devotion should be his own Sanctification. The Reasons why he should seek it.

THE second object of true devotion is man's own sanctification. He should desire it effectually, not as an embellishment and the perfection of his soul, but as something which God has commanded; which is agreeable to him, and which contributes to his glory. He should not strive to acquire virtues merely to please himself in them, but to please God. Indeed, he should not even consider whether their acquisition be pleasing to himself or not; but he should act with honesty and simplicity, without seeking to bear witness to himself of the goodness of his

actions. Furthermore, he should carefully avoid all sin and all imperfection, not merely because it would be a pollution and deformity of his soul, but because it is an offence to God; a disorder which wounds his infinite sanctity and purity; an object which is odious to him, and which provokes his indignation. And, while the devoted Christian is sorry toward God for any fault he has committed, he should at the same time be glad of the feeling of shame and humiliation it has produced in himself. He should aspire to holiness, not to possess it and appropriate it as his own, but to offer it in homage to God; to render to God all the glory of it, because he is its only source. He should desire to be holy, not according to his own way or his own idea, but according to the way and the idea of God. He must not forget that his sanctification is much more the work of God than of himself; that, even if he should labor to attain

it by himself, he would only spoil the work. The work of sanctification belongs to God to begin, to continue, and to finish. It must be left to him to accomplish this great work. Man should place no obstacle in the way, but should second God's sanctifying work by his consent and co-operation. In short, he should not aim at a sublime sanctity by a false elevation of sentiment, or by a jealous emulation of certain privileged souls; but he should wish only to fulfil the measure of holiness to which God calls him; to correspond with the grace he has received, and to be faithful according to his ability; content with having received only one talent, provided he may double it, as if he had received either five or ten talents.

CHAPTER VII.

Third Object of our Devotion. Our Happiness.

THE third object of our devotion, that which interests us the most, is our happiness. It is inseparably attached to our devotion to God. To be happy is to be united to a sovereign Good, and devotion begins this union here in time to consummate it in eternity. Our happiness is an essential result of our sanctification; because it is a fixed principle, that whatever tends to make us better tends also to make us happier. Perfection and happiness are linked together as cause and effect. This is true, even with regard to God; for in him felicity is not so much a perfection, as the result of all his infinite perfections. It is, then, unquestionably true,

that devotion, rightly understood and rightly practised, is the source, and the only source, of solid happiness that man can taste on earth. But this passing happiness is only a shadow when we compare it with the eternal beatitude promised by God to those who have been devoted to him. God, in thinking of his own glory, has not neglected our interests, but has made the two a mutual dependence: so that in our submission to his will we might find all the advantages of both the present and the future life. If devotion does not produce this effect, it is not to itself that we must attribute the fault, but to those who misconceive and misapply it. Thus, in the infinitely just and infinitely simple idea of the Divine Mind, the other two objects, namely, our sanctification and our happiness, are reduced to the first, — that is to say, to God's glory, — and are blended with it. Where God sees the rendering of glory which

he expects from us in all our thoughts, words, and deeds, there he sees our sanctity and our happiness. It is for this reason that the truly devout man regards his own sanctification as only a means of glorifying God, and his happiness as enshrined within that glory of which it is the consequence. Thus he makes the glory of God his principal object, and the great end of his actions, assured that, even without thinking of it especially, he will become holy and happy in proportion as he promotes God's glory. He does not exclude the other two objects. God forbid! He thinks of them often, but the first exceeds and overshadows both the others. It is not thus with the ordinary devout man. The object to which he gives the preference and his greatest attention is his own salvation. He has only this thought in his mind; he does that which he deems proper to assure it; he avoids that which he fears may endan-

ger it. Behold the measure, then, of his holiness: it rises little above mere self-love. As to the glory of God, it is seldom that he acts directly for that end; although he would willingly allow nothing in himself that might be opposed to it. But regard to his own interest, which he considers above every thing, leads him to reverse the order of these three objects, which God has given. From thence spring all the defects of his devotion.

CHAPTER VIII.

Qualities of True Devotion to God. The Spirit of Prayer.

WE now come to the detail of those qualities which characterize devotion to God. Nobody is ignorant that devotion is supernatural: under which aspect let us regard it; supernatural in its object, which is God, known, not by reason simply, but by faith; supernatural in its motives, in its means, in its end; supernatural in that it is impossible for man to conceive the idea of it by his own intelligence, to embrace it by his own will, or to put it in practice by his own strength; supernatural in that it favors nothing in our corrupt nature, but combats it, and proposes to reform it. We can only be

drawn to devotion by the influence of grace, which enlightens the mind, solicits the will, and fortifies the spirit; and we can only be sustained to make progress therein, and attain to perfection, by the help of grace. As, with the exception of certain prevenient and sacramental graces which ever assist the soul, God grants others only through the medium of prayer, it follows, that the first thing that inspires devotion is an attraction for prayer; or, rather, it is itself that spirit of grace and prayer which God has promised by his prophet to pour out upon his people.

It is a spirit of prayer; that is, a disposition, an habitual tendency, of the soul to rise up towards God, and to unite itself with him, adoring his supreme majesty, thanking him for his mercies, asking pardon of its sins, and imploring him to vouchsafe the spiritual help necessary to its weakness. It is a spirit of grace, because this disposition and this

tendency are the effects of grace. I say an habitual tendency, which subsists always in the depth of the will, which holds it always turned towards God, and which, according to the occasion and the need, is manifested by distinct and formal acts, proffered by the lips or the heart. These acts cannot be constant: but the interior affection, which produces and animates them, can and ought to be; and this is that habitual elevation of soul which is inculcated in the precept of Christ, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." If you have this spirit of prayer, O Christian soul! you have true devotion; but you do not yet possess it if you are led to prayer only by duty and necessity, and not by love and desire. You do not possess it if this exercise is painful to you; if it costs you a great effort; if you are careless, lukewarm, willingly distracted, or subject to *ennui;* if you count the moments; if you

shorten them more than you ought; in brief, if you pay God as a bad debtor pays his debt. In this way, from habit, from routine, from human respect, because the rule or the state of life demands it, one may make many prayers without having the spirit of prayer; and nothing is more common.

CHAPTER IX.

Devotion, to be True, should be Interior.

THE spirit of prayer is evidently an interior spirit, since it is a spirit of grace; the "Spirit which makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered;" the spirit of the Son which God sends into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father;" that filial affection which is as a continual yearning of the heart towards God our Father. This divine spirit dwells in the inmost recesses of the soul, deeper than all human affection; and it is upon the noblest faculties, upon the intelligence, the will, the affections, that it displays its power. True devotion is then essentially interior, and it inspires pure thought and pure feeling. From

within it diffuses itself without, around, and gives life to all external works of piety. What, indeed, would be a devotion that was purely exterior, that was expressed only in words and vain protestations, or in actions which had no spring in the heart? This would be only a semblance of devotion, which might deceive man, who judges only according to appearances, but which could not impose upon God, whose eye penetrates the soul. Provided one renders useful service, men seldom question the good will of him who serves. But what need has God of our homage? He desires it only so far as it may glorify him; and this it cannot do unless it be sincere, springing from the heart. Again, devotion is interior in that it withdraws the soul from all exterior objects which distract it; recalls it to itself, concentrates it upon God, and helps it to realize his presence within him. It teaches him recollection;

teaches him to regulate his imagination, to restrain vain thoughts, to subdue excitement, and to fix his wandering desires, to gather all his forces to hold himself united with Him to whom he is devoted. By this interior union with God, the soul hallows, not only its vocal and mental prayers, not only the practice of its devotion and good works, but also the actions of his physical nature, such as eating, drinking, and sleeping, and those which seem the most indifferent conversation and innocent recreations, all of which are made to redound to the glory of God, according to the counsel of the apostle (1 Cor. x. 31). Devotion gives to the Christian an experimental knowledge of that word of Christ, "The kingdom of God is within you," — that word of which none but the truly devout can comprehend the meaning. God exercises this dominion within by the operation of his grace, which renders the soul attentive to his voice, by

which he ever indicates his will; and as this voice has an infinite delicacy, and cannot be heard in the distraction, the tumult, and the excitement of the passions, the soul that in some deep experience has once felt its power, and knows the advantage of rendering itself perfectly docile, studies to keep itself in recollection, in calmness, in a certain interior solitude, and in close attention, that it may not lose any of the instructions or warnings God may give. It is thus that a servant devoted to his master is always ready to do his will; does not allow himself to be distracted by the cares of others; listens to all his words, endeavors to understand them; observes his looks, his gestures, and the least indication of his wishes. This attention ought so far as possible to be continual, because the action of grace is continual. It is a cord which leads him, which he must always hold in his hand, and which he cannot drop for a

moment without going astray. Thus, when one has given one's self entirely to God, his interior admonitions are constant, and are very sensibly felt, until one has acquired the habit of acting in every thing by the spirit of grace. Then, this spirit having become familiar and natural, one follows it without being conscious of it; but its influence over the whole life is only the greater. It may be objected that so strong and so sustained an effort would be wearisome. I reply, that, if it be in any way painful, love softens it; and habit renders easy that which costs much in the beginning.

CHAPTER X.

Devotion must be manifested in External Actions. Reasons which prove this True.

IT would be a very great delusion to believe that devotion is only interior, and, under the pretext that God looks within, to suppress vocal prayer, and all other exterior demonstrations. We are men, not pure spirits. It is proper that the body should take part in the homage of the soul, and that our principal organs should be employed in the praise of God. It is for this we have received them, and it is the most noble use we can make of them. It is necessary that every human being should adore and pray. Moreover, the soul needs to be awakened, and sustained in its piety, by that which appeals

to the senses. The external accessories of worship, the order and majesty of ceremonies, the variations and harmony of music, pictures, and other pious objects, are aids to devotion. The humble disposition of the body, the bended knee, the folded hands, the eyes modestly lowered, or raised towards heaven, are expressions of reverence and attention in prayer; and involuntarily the soul manifests its feeling by these external signs. Religion, being of the first importance, demands a common worship, therefore a public and external worship, in which we may offer to God the same vows and the same prayers, and may stimulate each other by singing his praise together. The divine institution of the ministry is an evident proof of the necessity of an external worship. There never was a truly devout person, even though living in solitude, who did not have some fixed time every day for vocal prayer.

The interior spirit inspires it, even in those who apply themselves mostly to contemplation; for if, in passing moments, the allurement of contemplation is so strong as to oblige them to suspend the vocal prayer, it is only to resume it as soon as the spirit is free again. Whether we pray in the house of God, or in private, we should not so abandon ourselves to mental prayer as to omit vocal prayer. The former could not sustain itself long without the latter, and would inevitably degenerate into a luxurious and dangerous dreaminess. It is difficult to acquire ease and freedom in vocal prayer unless it is joined to the practice of meditation, which nourishes the soul; and meditation, too, will be barren and fruitless if not aided by vocal prayer. It frequently happens, that the soul, deeply penetrated with this spirit of prayer, cannot restrain its joy and its transports; and it expresses them by words, by looks, by

sighs, by tears, and by divers movements. This is only the result of the union of soul and body, and of their mutual correspondence.

CHAPTER XI.

The Error of those who exclude Mental Prayer from Devotion.

IF it is an abuse to exclude vocal prayer from devotion, it is a much more common fault to banish mental prayer. This may be excusable in coarse and ignorant people, who scarcely know the use of the spirit, and also in the very young, in whom the extreme lightness of the imagination requires to be fixed by something sensible. But is it pardonable for the mature and well instructed to pray only from a book? to persuade themselves that they are idle if they do not move their lips, and that God does not hear them unless they articulate their requests, often so loudly, too, as to disturb

those who are praying beside them? The slightest act which the heart may make, or the slightest feeling which may flow from the heart, pleases God far more, and is far more profitable to the penitent, than long prayers said from a book, while the heart is cold and empty. Vainly do they say that such cold prayers, merely said from a book, stir and nourish their devotion. Possibly their imagination may be excited by the exalted and fine language of the written prayer; and if this leads to the stirring of the heart, well. But if not, if the heart remain unmoved, such will find that in a little time they weary of the same formula; it soon makes no impression upon them: they utter it mechanically and from memory; then they have recourse to others, of which also they become disgusted: and soon all methods are exhausted, and they are utterly at a loss what to do. Why not begin early the habit of

recollection; of searching, like David, in his heart, for the prayer he would make unto God (Ps. xix. 14); to complain of our coldness and insensibility, and implore him to enrich our spiritual poverty? Would it be praying wrongly, humbly to acknowledge before God one's own weakness, and to draw down grace from above by profound cries for mercy? and, if one should have occasionally some good thoughts, to attribute them gratefully to the Author of all good? When the source of devotion is *in the heart*, it is inexhaustible; for the affections which spring from the heart are ever varied, and one finds in it ever new and fresh delight. Studied discourse is not *necessary* for its utterance: it uses rather the simplest, the most natural, the most earnest, expressions. Even the silence of a heart touched and softened is more eloquent than words; and in many instances the heart has no other

resource than silence, to testify to God all it feels.

In praying one must avoid idleness of heart. For idleness of heart at prayer is the mortal sin of sloth. If one speak of meditation to a person who thinks he has only to open his book and read his prayers formally, he will say, I cannot meditate: the slightest effort makes my brain reel. It must be admitted, that meditation is painful to those who are not accustomed to reflect; that a vivid imagination is required there, which few are capable of sustaining for a long time. If it is proposed to them to abandon the considerations when they are before God, and to pass on quickly to the affections, they reply that their will is not easily moved; that, if they have any good impulse, it is quickly dissipated, and that is why they make use of books. If I tell them to hold themselves simply in repose, and to draw down upon

them the dew of heaven by short and earnest acts, repeated from time to time, they do not hesitate to condemn this repose as idleness, and to declare their aversion to this kind of prayer; which is, however, the prayer of spiritual souls. But spiritual they are not, though they believe themselves to be so, and flatter themselves that they are devoted, because they speak to God much and frequently, as they do to their equals; and, instead of warming and quickening, they only dry up and wither, their souls. Let them say what they will, self-love presides over their prayers: they offer them to themselves, rather than to God. Their object is, to bear witness to themselves that they have prayed; and they think they have palpable proof of it when they have recited a great many prayers. It is for the same reason that many speak aloud, that the ear also may serve as a witness. St. Anthony, who was doubtless

a very devout man, when interrogated as to the best manner of praying, replied, "It is when one prays without being aware of it."

CHAPTER XII.

It is Necessary to give one's self up to God without Restriction and without Reserve.

TRUE devotion admits of no reserve. It consists in surrendering the soul entirely to grace, and in being resolved to follow wheresoever and to whatsoever it may lead. This absolute surrender to grace calls upon us to remove every obstacle which may hinder its action as far as is possible, to follow it step by step with an exact fidelity, not to anticipate it, nor to rush into the excesses of an indiscreet fervor. One is subject to this latter fault in the first transports of a deepening love. Many saints are reproached for it, especially St. Bernard, who soon ruined his stomach by excessive abstinence. Such ex-

cess is a temptation of the Devil, who tries, when we first enter upon this devout life, to exhaust our strength, that we may be prevented from persevering, or may be induced to relapse. We shall be in no danger of falling, if in regard to fasting, vigils, and all religious exercises, we seek wise counsel and follow it. To compromise with God, to be willing to put no restraint upon one's self beyond a certain point, to prescribe the limit of one's spiritual course, and to be determined not to pass it, is not to devote one's self to God, but to give him only a partial and limited service. In our devotion to man, there must always be some reserve; since the rights of God, at least, should always be excepted. But God being infinitely superior to all, and nothing being able to limit the exercise of his dominion over his creatures, his service is susceptible of no reserve; and whoever embraces it must do so

without exception and without condition. To devote one's self to him is to determine to know no other law than his supreme will, and to conform to that at whatever sacrifice. One must not consider his own weakness, and say, I never could do this or that, even though grace should require it of me. The will of God renders possible all which it commands, because it always joins to the command the means of accomplishing it. God would be unjust if, when demanding something of us, he should not give us sufficient strength to perform it. You read of certain heroic traits in the life of the saints; yet, while admiring them, you refuse to imitate them. But how do you know that God does not demand the same things of you? And, if he demands them, why should you not be able by his grace to do that which others have done? Be not dismayed, however: that which to-day seems absolutely impracti-

cable will seem to you easy, at least very possible, when the proper time shall come. It is not always an evil intention that leads one to make a secret reserve on entering the life of devotion; if it were, I do not hesitate to say such devotion would be false and delusive: should one manifestly expose himself to the danger of not fulfilling his vows, God would give us grace to serve him in one's own way; and one would thereby risk his salvation, whatever desire he might have to secure it. The usual cause of this reserve is, that seeing openly the vast career of holiness, and consulting one's present strength, one thinks that he is utterly unable to go through to the end. He resolves to enter it, because he is rightly disposed; but he makes a plan conformed to his actual feebleness, to which he designs to subject himself without going farther. This is a great error, which springs partly from ignorance; partly from self-love,

desirous of managing itself; and partly from Satan, who is jealous of our progress. We ought to remember that grace is the only source of our strength; that it will increase in proportion to our fidelity; that God gives strength according to our need, so that the more we advance, the more we are impelled to advance, and the more easily we surmount all obstacles. What should we say of a child, who, without considering that his strength would insensibly increase with his age, should regulate by his present weakness the burden he ought to carry when he is a man, and would not believe that he would then be able to carry one twenty times heavier? Whoever you may be, then, if you wish to give yourself to God, do so heartily and entirely. Enter into no compromise; apprehend but one thing, that of not having sufficient generosity. Remember that the least reserve will weaken you, even for the things

which you cheerfully consent to do; and, on the contrary, the burden will be the lighter the more you do not seek to diminish it. This will appear a paradox only to him who does not believe that God will display all the power of his grace in favor of a noble and generous soul, who spares nothing to please him, and that a close and narrow heart constrains him against his will to use reserve on his part. It is not my design to explain in detail what it is to have no reserve with God, nor what kind of reserve, open or hidden, may enter into most of our devotions: this would be beyond the narrow limits of this work. Practice will teach earnest souls more than it would be possible for me to say.

CHAPTER XIII.

True Devotion requires an Undivided Heart.

TRUE devotion allows but one single object, — "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Such is the law of devotion. The adoration which comprises the homage of the mind and the heart excludes all reserve, and the service which belongs to God alone excludes all division. Every other service is legitimate only as it flows out of this, and is dependent upon it. Christ has declared that "no man can serve two masters," such as God and the world, whose wills are contrary, whose laws are opposed, the one to the other, and consequently whose service is incompatible. God wants me all to himself: the world

wants me all to itself. There is no way of harmonizing their claims, which are mutually destructive of each other. It is necessary that I should choose: and, if I love the one, I must hate the other; if I obey the one, I must despise the other. How can one be deceived upon so evident a truth? Yet Christendom is full of religious people who endeavor to conciliate the interests of God with those of the world; who pretend to unite in the same heart the love of God and the love of the world; and who, wishing to serve both, really serve neither. We might say to them as the prophet Elijah said to the Israelites, "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, serve him: if Baal, then serve him." People think they do not hold fast to the world because they have renounced every thing which is criminal and evidently dangerous. They are no longer slaves to lust, which is the principal

divinity of this world; but they are still slaves to interest and false honor. On these two objects they follow the maxims reproved by the gospel, making wealth, nobility, honor, and all that elevates or distinguishes us, the whole business of life; loving and desiring these things for themselves and their children, and putting forth every effort to preserve them or to procure them. They adopt on all occasions the judgments of the world, and they conform their conduct thereto. They are jealous of its esteem, and fear to lose it by openly declaring in favor of piety; and they retain it at the expense of virtue, notwithstanding the reproaches of conscience. They fear its ridicule and its censure, and they manage to shield themselves from it; the service of God suffers; they are tormented, and drawn violently on both sides; human respect enslaves them, and holds them continually in mortal fear. They wish to belong to

God, yet they blush at the appearance of being his: they pray in secret, and they conceal the performance of their religious duties with as much care as if they were committing some evil deed. What slavery! What torment! What infidelity! What carelessness! What cowardice! Is this to be devoted to God? Shall he be served only in secret? Is it a shame to own him as your Master? They do not wish to attract public notice, they say. If by public notice they mean making a parade of devotion, displaying it ostentatiously, seeking to be seen and applauded in what they do, they are right, and follow the precept of the gospel, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. vi. 1–6). But between display of that sort, and trembling to appear in public as the servant of God, devoted to the glory and the interests of so great and good a Master, there is a middle path, which is, to go calmly on one's

way without troubling one's self whether one is observed; to follow one's conscience righteously; to render to God, without affectation, but openly, the homage he expects of us, for his glory, and the edification of our neighbor; and to reserve in secret only that which requires to be concealed from the eye of others. The truly devout know well how to keep this middle path. They are not afraid others should know that they serve God with all their heart, and that they have for the world only contempt and horror: they explain this clearly on occasions when it seems necessary, and which oblige them to tread human respect under foot. But they are no less careful to withdraw from other eyes certain practices of piety, certain good works, the knowledge of which belongs to God alone. In this way they exemplify the precept of Christ, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and*

glorify your Father which is in heaven;" and also what he says in another place, "*Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them;*" and again, "*When ye pray, be not as the hypocrites: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men; but* THOU, *when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.*" They keep always in remembrance that sentence pronounced by our Lord, "*Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father.*" I know, indeed, that prudence authorizes some discretion. A feeble virtue ought not to be exposed to the full day, nor too boldly to dare human respect; because it may not be able to sustain the assaults which will be made against it. The deference and respect

due to a father, a husband, or a master, who has little regard for piety, must be observed; and one must carefully avoid every thing which can offend or irritate them. This the early Christians did in domestic persecutions. For the sake of peace they did not declare themselves to their masters, their parents, nor their idolatrous friends: the brother avoided the suspicious looks of his brother, the wife avoided her husband, and, in general, the believer avoided the unbeliever. To-day, more than ever, there are circumstances in which one must observe the same line of conduct. But when one is not responsible to anybody for his actions, and has nothing to fear but the powerless censure of the worldly, he should not hesitate to be brave, to walk uprightly, and to appear openly what he is, and what he desires to be. Do the partisans of the world fear to declare themselves? Did he himself fear it when he was of their num-

ber? The shortest way for him now is, to break with it absolutely, heart and will; to assume a manner of seeing, of judging, of speaking, and of acting, entirely opposed to it; to hold with it no other relations than those which are indispensable and compatible with the most delicate piety; to renounce its esteem, to rise above its maxims, and to rejoice like the apostles, and all true disciples of Christ, when it criticises, blames, despises, calumniates, and persecutes. Devotion to God demands all these dispositions, and it yields them if it is sincere. When one has resolutely taken this part, he is well recompensed, even in this life: he is loosed from all chains; he is free without, peaceable within: God is satisfied, conscience makes no reproaches, and the world itself admires and approves the contempt he has for it.

CHAPTER XIV.

Devotion is for Persons of Every Age.

TRUE devotion is for persons of every age and every condition: it extends to all situations, and to all the conduct of life. When the Christian first comes to the use of his reason, he should consecrate to God the thoughts of his mind and the affections of his heart. It is the first-fruits which God regards most tenderly. He requires that the devotion of childhood should be the result of the first development of the soul. In that happy age, when all is candor and innocence, the more the spirit is disengaged from prejudice, the more the heart is free from passion, the purer is the conscience, and the more also is the child susceptible of

a sincere, tender, simple, and honest piety. "Suffer the little children to come unto me," said our Lord. They are unconscious of malice; the world has neither seduced nor corrupted them; they are free from every stain; their artless souls are flexible to all the movements of grace; the kingdom of heaven is for such as they, and those who would enter into it must become as little children. Give yourselves, then, to God in your youth, and respond to his sweet invitation. You are sensible of the love of father and mother; prove also the love of your heavenly Father. It is to you he says, "Taste and see how gracious the Lord is." Early embrace his love, and this holy affection will preserve you from the poisoned flattery which the world will some day offer you; and you Christian parents, you teachers of the young, you who mould the conscience, hasten to bend it under the yoke of Christ.

It is good for thee to bear the yoke in thy youth, for then the soul is pliable and easily fashioned; and, if it should some time have the misfortune to throw it off, it will the more easily return to it. The farther one advances in the light of reason, the more inexcusable he is for not devoting himself to God. True, the passions begin to assert themselves, and their tumultuous noise tends to stifle the voice of grace; but it is easy to impose silence upon them when they first rise, or at least to preserve the heart from their seduction. They cannot stand against the exercises of piety, the reading of good books, good advice and good example, and the frequent use of the means of grace in the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In manhood, when reason is in its strength, when the heart has more consistence, and the character more solidity, grace would act more efficaciously upon the soul, to determine it on the side of

devotion, if the cares of life, the absorbing anxieties of ambition, and bad habits contracted in youth, did not raise an obstacle in its way. But there is nothing over which a right spirit and a strong will may not triumph. Upon what plausible pretext, then, can the Christian dispense with a devotion, of which he feels more than ever the necessity? If it is that he should occupy himself most earnestly with his fortune, is it not important that he should think of the permanent establishment which his labor will procure for him in heaven? that he should direct toward this object, the only real object of interest, all his efforts and all his designs? In old age, when the fire of passion is extinguished, and no longer thwarts the determinations of the will; when experience has dispelled the charm and the illusion of the world; when objects make little impression upon the enfeebled senses; when disease and weakness give

warning that the end of life draws near, — every thing invites, every thing urges, him to offer to God at least the last moments of life, and to compensate, by a fervent and solid piety, for the many years of which he has robbed him, by a shameful and perhaps a criminal course. There can be no delay: death is advancing with rapid steps; and, when his last sickness shall overtake him, it will be too late. The carelessness of childhood, the impetuosity of youth, the private and public occupations of mature years, the inertia of old age, cannot be regarded as any excuse, or any reason for dispensation. In conclusion, all that can be said is, that every age presents its own difficulties to overcome; and, in every time of life, it is necessary to do violence to nature in order to belong to God.

CHAPTER XV.

Devotion extends to All Conditions.

THE same judgment must be given to all conditions of life. Each one offers a favorable and an unfavorable side to devotion, and not one of them offers any legitimate reason for exemption. Greatness has its dangers; and we cannot be secure against them, except by special protection of God, — protection which we ought not to expect unless we are devoted to his service. Public offices have great duties to be fulfilled, and they are exposed to great temptations. How can we hope to perform these duties and resist these temptations without devotion? Cares and occupations multiply, and leave us scarcely time to breathe; but, if the heart is conse-

crated to God, we shall be free in the midst of all these distractions, which will become occasions for us to testify our obedience and our love. How many have been sanctified in military life, where the obstacles appear insurmountable! How many in the government departments! How many in charge of the public revenues! Some conditions are excepted, — such as are in themselves contrary to salvation, and are proscribed by the gospel; which nobody is obliged to accept, and which are only tolerated in some governments on account of policy. Excepting these I assert confidently, that there is no state of life in which saints may not be formed; in which, indeed, they are not formed every day. Would God, the Author of all the various conditions of society, have established one in which it was morally impossible to be saved? If in some there are greater difficulties, there he has also given

greater help; and all who have surrendered themselves to his guidance have learned this happy experience. Devotion comprises all situations. It is equally necessary in sickness and in health, in prosperity and in adversity, in wealth and in poverty, in sadness and in joy, in all the good and the evil of this present life; and as evil is incomparably more common than good, and all human resources are insufficient on many occasions, it follows, that devotion to God, and submission to his will, are the only solid consolation which remains to the Christian amid all his afflictions and crosses, of whatever nature they may be. Devotion also extends naturally to all actions, and there is not one which may not be sanctified by it. That is not a perfect devotion which does not include, under the dominion of God, all that may be comprised therein, even such of our actions as may be considered especially human. The design of God

is, that they all may be referred to him, and may be made to subserve to his glory. Thus the truly devoted consecrate every thing to him without exception, and sanctify them by this consecration. They know that, where men act conformably to reason, the Christian must act conformably to religion. It is not sufficient that he act in a state of grace, but he must act according to a principle of grace. As, to act reasonably, it is not enough that a man simply makes use of his reason, but he must apply it to that which he actually does. This principle, which is an incontrovertible truth, leads far, if one will take ever so little trouble to understand it. He deceives himself who considers himself devoted because he performs every day by routine a certain number of pious exercises, yet lives in dissipation, indulging without restraint in all kinds of thoughts, desires, and actions, provided only he commits nothing criminal. By this

reckoning he gives to God a certain amount of time daily, and does as he pleases with the remainder of the day. But this is not at all the right thing. Every moment belongs to him; and he demands that all our time be employed in a manner worthy of him and of our Christian profession, and we are not at liberty to dispose of it at our own pleasure. The duties of our state in life, labor, and whatever relaxation may be granted to nature, must fill up the empty spaces of the day; but nothing should interrupt that incessant prayer which Christ and his apostles recommended: "*Ye ought always to pray, and not to faint.*" "*Pray without ceasing.*" The object of prescribed prayers is, to draw down the blessing of Heaven when His grace is especially needed; as one is tempted to divert himself, and to act in a manner entirely human, and to commit many faults without being aware of it.

CHAPTER XVI.

Love is the only Foundation of Devotion.

LOVE alone can produce devotion. It is love which gives it birth, growth, and perfection; and the practice of devotion, in its turn, nourishes and strengthens love. We may define devotion as the love of God reduced to exercise. What would be that devotion which had not for its principal cause the love of the object to which we are devoted? If we are devoted to a creature only in proportion as we give him affection, earnestly embrace his interests, eagerly seek every occasion to please and oblige him, sparing nothing for his comfort, his health, his good, not even our life, how much more affectionate, earnest, hearty, and generous

ought to be the feelings of a soul devoted to God! When he bids us *love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength,* is it not equivalent to a command to be entirely devoted to him? Devotion is the fulfilling to the letter the great precept of the love of God. So far as devotion fails, so far does the accomplishment of this precept fail; and we may say of devotion as of love, that it is the fulfilment of the law. Perfect devotion casteth out fear, even as perfect charity. Devotion is the characteristic of children, even as fear is that of slaves. Fear sees in God a master, a judge, an avenger, and serves him under these aspects. Devotion sees in him a Father, whom it fears, respects, and obeys, because it loves him. Fear may dispose a soul to become devoted, but it cannot make it such; for, the moment it is devoted, it is no longer fear, but love, that rules within it. Love, wherever

it may be, tends to reign alone, and especially to banish fear, to which it is entirely opposed. Fear has its source in self-love, which is the enemy of the love of God, and the foe of devotion. Consider the souls who serve God from the fear of being lost; who are impressed only by the terrible truths of religion, and who are always frozen with fright. To whom are they devoted? Is it to God? No! it is to themselves, and their own interests. Why do they fear sin? Is it because it offends God? By no means! It is because God will punish it. Why do they tremble at hell? Is it because of the suffering of the damned through the eternal banishment from God? Not at all! Physical pain, eternal flames, are all they dread. Let us not confound here the terror which springs from a lively and feeble imagination, and which the heart disowns, with that which originates in low and servile sentiments.

Many truly devoted persons are subject to this terror, which torments them, and which they have great difficulty in overcoming. But it diminishes as they advance in the life of devotion, and at last it will wholly disappear. It is not seldom, that, after having been afraid all their life of the judgments of God, they die in peace, confidence, and security.

CHAPTER XVII.

To be truly devoted, one must forget his Own Interests, and seek God only.

FOR the same reason, true devotion is not mercenary nor interested. In the beginning, it is true, when God lavishes his favors, it depends upon them too much; it courts them, and this is one of the motives of its fidelity: but soon it rises above all these; and, after God has severed it from them, it serves him with no less zeal and diligence. The devoted soul, at its entrance on this career, becomes a child. God treats it as a child; and it would not be just to attribute to it mercenary designs, because consolations are its attraction and delight. With regard to salvation, whatever

progress the soul makes in devotion, it always desires it; and it rejects with horror any indifference to this essential end, but it desires it less for itself than for God. It desires, indeed, its own happiness; and should it not desire this? But it desires very much more the glory and the good pleasure of God. It serves him, like David, because of the recompense; but this is only a secondary motive: love is the first and the principal one. He who loves sincerely, views the beloved object with a direct regard, which does not fall back upon its own interest. He does not exclude it; he cannot exclude it, indeed, since he has put his happiness in the possession of him whom he loves: but he does not establish his end in this possession because it makes him happy; but he establishes it in the glory which redounds to God, and in the accomplishment of his will. I will not enlarge further upon the purity and ex-

treme delicacy of divine love; but we should reflect attentively upon the qualities of the devotion which has God for its object, and we should understand how it ought to be disengaged from every thought of self-interest. I do not know how far it may be on the earth in some privileged souls; they alone can tell: but it is certain that no thought of self-interest, no return upon self, has any place in the abode of the blessed; and it is this which renders their happiness complete. It is a truth incomprehensible to self-love, — a truth which desolates it, and puts it in despair, because it cannot conform to the idea of a happiness in which it has no part, and from which it is totally excluded. Devotion, if it is solid, and if love is its moving principle, tends to that admirable clearness of vision which belongs to the inhabitants of heaven; and, if it cannot fully attain to it, it strives at least to approach it. Let us see

if this is ours. Let us not fear to examine our motives, and, with the aid of grace, let us endeavor to purify them. For the fear of being lost ourselves, let us substitute the fear of losing God; for the interested desire of saving ourselves, let us substitute that of possessing God, and of being eternally united to him. Substantially it is the same thing. The object is not changed, but the manner of regarding it is very different; and it is this difference of aspect and of motive which gives to devotion various degrees of excellence and perfection.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Fatal Effects of Self-Love upon Devotion.

AFTER what we have just said, what becomes of all the devotions, of which self-love is the foundation? How false they are! How deceitful, and yet how common! I do not speak of that gross self-love which fosters passion and vice: I speak of a spiritual self-love, which glides subtly into the practices of piety, — a self-love which has its capital vices; which is proud, covetous, envious, voluptuous, avaricious, censorious, and idle; which is none the less blind, and the danger of which is greater in proportion as the objects to which it is attached are holy. Are such devoted people rare, as nourish a secret pride, and, like the Phar-

isees, are full of self-esteem, and contempt for their neighbor? who attribute to themselves the gifts and graces of God, and fear nothing so much as to be deprived of them; who envy those whom they think more favored or more advanced than themselves; who *flavor* celestial sweetness with sensuality; who are covetous and insatiable; who are passionate, malicious, filled with hate and bitterness, and all, as they fancy, in zeal for God; who indulge in relaxation, effeminacy, idleness, and all that is gratifying to nature? I admit, that in the beginning, and even in the progress of the spiritual life, we are more or less subject to these excesses, because of our natural imperfections. When one enters upon a life of piety, his self-love, torn from temporal things, throws itself back upon spiritual things. It seizes them, and desires to make them its prey; attaching itself to them with the more force, inasmuch as they

are the more excellent. But the truly devoted constantly endeavor to resist it, pursue it from place to place, and drive it from every spot on which it takes refuge. This battle is its main object; and it fears it will fall if it relaxes ever so slightly, or grows weary in its attacks. As the spirit of religion detaches man from temporal things, so the spirit of devotion detaches him from spiritual things; allows him not to delight in them, nor to assume them, nor to claim any right to them; and leads him by degrees to renunciation, self-abnegation, and perfect poverty. He has every thing, yet clings to nothing. God gives to and takes from him, how and when he pleases; and he is neither afflicted nor elated. Opposing vices do not disclose themselves at first, because of their subtlety: but, as we advance, we are illuminated with divine light, which teaches us to recognize them; and all the fidelity of devoted souls

consists in drawing down this light, receiving it with gratitude, and profiting by its suggestions. It costs long and painful effort; it requires great courage; it is necessary to crucify the natural will and affections, in order to eradicate entirely these subtle vices. It is the labor of the whole life; but, if we correspond with grace, we will surely attain our true end, and be delivered, as far as possible, from the tyranny of self-love. God beholds our earnest endeavor, and will finish. by proofs of mercy, what we could never accomplish of ourselves.

CHAPTER XIX.

Devotion inspires Confidence. Necessity of this Confidence, and its Good Effects.

DEVOTION, being the daughter of love, is the mother of confidence; for the more we love God, the more we confide in him: the one is the rule and measure of the other. The love of God is not a blind love, but a love founded upon the knowledge of his infinite goodness toward his creatures. It is this knowledge which leads us to repose upon him all our interests; never to distrust him; to believe, notwithstanding his apparent severity, that he loves us, that he wishes to save us, and that indeed he will save us, if we keep our confidence. "Throw yourself into his arms," said St. Augustine: "he will not

let you fall." I add to this thought of the holy doctor, that, if he should appear sometimes to withdraw from you, it is only that he wishes to prove you, and see how far your confidence will reach, in order to increase your reward. As this virtue is that which honors him the most, it is also that which he cultivates within us the most; and, in strong and generous souls, he tries it to the last extremity. Confidence holds the mean between two opposite vices, presumption and cowardice, both of which have the same source, self-love. We are presumptuous when we rely too much upon ourselves: we are weak, when, leaning only on ourselves, we realize how feeble is the support. The presumptuous man says, "Nothing will ever shake me:" the coward says, on the contrary, "The least breath will overthrow me." The man of confidence, looking at himself, says, like the coward, that any thing can overthrow

him ; but, looking at God, he adds that nothing can move him. Thus he unites the two sentiments, which are vicious when separated, but are virtuous when joined together. Nothing is more important, nothing of greater service, in the life of devotion, than confidence. God desires to exercise our faith. He constrains us to shut our eyes, and to walk blindly. He apparently perplexes us ; so that we know not where we are, nor whither we are going. He permits us to lose our foot-hold, takes from us all knowledge of our interior state, forbids us all introspection ; and, if we wish to seek some assurance, he abandons us to great anxiety. Why does he try us in this way? Simply to compel us to renounce ourselves, and to surrender ourselves wholly to him. What would become of faith, and to what would it serve, if one could always see clearly the state of his soul? if one always understood the reason of that which God

permits from one moment to another? if one followed not step by step the march and progress of his operations? The confidence of the blind man in his guide is founded in the fact that he himself sees nothing. The more unfamiliar the way through which he is led, the greater is his confidence. Though he believes it dangerous, and bordered with precipices, still he shows no anxiety, informs himself of nothing, and feels assured that he will not be led astray, but will be conducted safe, happily to the end. When one is devoted to God, confidence in him must be unlimited. To withdraw it, under whatever pretext, is to fall back, and follow his own leading. To assign certain limits, beyond which he resolves not to pass, is to place a restriction on his devotion, than which nothing is more derogatory to God, nor more harmful to his own spiritual growth. Is it not to doubt the goodness and the power of God

if we think he will not or can not draw our soul from every evil way, and from the most imminent dangers, when it is pledged to faith, and to entire submission to his guidance? It is absolutely impossible that God should fail such a soul, and should not succor him as he needs. That would be being untrue to himself. But he only can judge how far to test the soul, and to observe the precise moment when he will come to its relief. Let us abandon ourselves, then, to him, and say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

CHAPTER XX.

Devotion produces Self-Knowledge, and consequently Humility.

DEVOTION leads to self-knowledge, as well as to the knowledge of God; and as confidence is the fruit of the knowledge of God, so humility is the fruit of self-knowledge. Man does not and can not know himself by the light of nature alone, and it is for the want of this knowledge that he is proud. But, the moment he devotes himself to God, a celestial light shines upon him and illuminates him: he begins to see himself as he is, — filled with misery, weak, opposed to all good, inclined to all evil. Recollection renders him attentive to himself; and he soon learns that he has two natures, the one the enemy of the

other, and that the spiritual life is a perpetual warfare. Experience teaches him still more thoroughly. At the first attempt he learns how difficult it is to conquer himself; to struggle against his evil inclinations; how much time and effort the correction of the smallest fault requires; how much the practice of piety costs, notwithstanding his love for it; how much resistance he opposes to grace, by the weakness, the negligence, the unfaithfulness, of which he is guilty every day; how feeble his will; how transient his resolutions; how fruitless his good intentions; how strong over him are the dominion of the world, the flesh, and the Devil; and how, without special and continual help from God, he will surely fall! This experimental knowledge of himself, joined with the light he receives from above, inspires humility, which is nothing but the close conviction and consciousness of the fearful depth of corruption within, that age

and opportunities have developed. The farther we advance, the deeper becomes this conviction, and the more humility takes root in the heart. Hence his contempt of himself, his salutary distrust of his own strength, the sincere preference he gives to others; believing them to be better than himself, or, at least, not doubting, that, if they had received the same grace, they would have much more profited by it. Hence, also, that confusion in view of the favor God bestows upon him, and of the esteem and affection of others, and the approbation they confer. Instead of exalting him, all this humbles and abases him. If he reflects upon himself, it is only to humble him the more. He is blind to his virtues, ignores his progress, attributes all his victories to God, and his failures to himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

Simplicity and the Fear of Observation are the Characteristics of True Devotion: How few possess them.

TRUE devotion, so far as it depends upon itself, walks by the simplest and most common way. It follows the beaten path, and avoids the unfrequented by-ways. It has a horror of irregularity, always fearing to be observed and noticed: its desire is to be hidden and lost in the crowd. It loves piety, and prefers above all others the practices which have less show and more substance. It is like the lowly violet, which dares not lift itself up to the light, but which is trodden under foot in the grass which covers it. Except what is necessary

for the example and edification of his neighbor, it is careful to conceal its conduct from the observation of others. It is perfectly natural, neither affected nor fastidious. Instead of desiring extraordinary gifts, it deems itself unworthy of them; and it continually asks God to do nothing for it which may attract the attention of man, or give to it the slightest consideration. It aspires not to the saints who are distinguished, who have had visions, revelations, gifts of prophecy, and other singular graces, and who have been the marvel of their age. It admires and reveres those who have displayed these gifts; but it chooses for its own part, obscurity, scorn, ignominy, to be nothing, to be known by his deficiencies, or altogether ignored and forgotten. Good works which make a noise in the world are not to its taste: it prefers those to which God is the only witness. It recommends secrecy to its beneficiaries, and

conceals from them, as far as possible, the source of their benefits. It would like to conceal it from itself, that its left hand might not know what its right hand doeth. It forgets it, and reproaches itself for the least memory of it, or complaisance in it, as for a fault. The devoted of this character are so rare, that one might think I have just drawn an imaginary portrait. There are some such, however; and it is because they have nothing to distinguish them that we fancy them more rare than they are. In many others, however, you see only singularity, affectation, and ostentation. They have their own air, manner, and style of dressing, their language and conduct: imagination seduces them, the Devil deceives them, pride devours them. Who would believe that so refined a pride could insinuate itself into a life of piety? Who would believe that one could devote himself to God merely to gratify himself? that

one should aspire to sanctity in order to gain a reputation? that one should gather the fruit of virtue, only to approve himself, and to win the approbation of others? I do not assert that such Christians as these are altogether hypocrites, nor that these traits belong to every one of them in all their strength: but it is true that very few found their devotion upon humility; that pride, the most subtle of all the vices, is that of which he distrusts himself the least; that it is incomparably the most dangerous; that nothing so entirely blinds us; that it is the most deeply rooted in the human heart, the most difficult to subdue, the longest to extirpate. It is more to be feared for those who profess an exalted piety than for any others, because it is especially that to which it attaches itself: it is, indeed, the worm which gnaws and corrupts it. We cannot be too much on our guard against it; and, if we drive it from one

place, it will return to another. Would you know what is the touchstone of true devotion? It is the love of humiliations. He who sincerely desires them; who makes them the great object of his prayers; who receives them with interior joy, notwithstanding the repugnance of nature; who thanks God for them; who regards them as a most precious boon; who does nothing to escape them; who is glad that his faults are known, that he is reproached for his defects, that his virtues should be traduced, and his reputation sullied; and who, if it were contrary to the will of God, will not allow one word for his justification, — this is the truly devoted, the perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. I ask now, are there many truly devoted? Are we of that number? Let each one answer to himself, and let him be advised that he has advanced very little in the life of devotion if he feels himself to be far removed from this perfection.

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CHAPTER XXII.

Mortification of the Senses is Another Quality of Devotion.

DEVOTION is no less the friend of mortification than of humility: indeed, humility is really the main branch of mortification; its object being, to make a man die to all love of himself and of his own excellence. The other two branches are, the death of the disorderly affections of the flesh, and of one's natural inclination to follow his own will and self-interest. The truly devoted spares himself no more over these last two objects than over the first. He knows that mortification is what God especially demands of him. Prayer is rather God's work than his own, but all devotion is

comprised in the practice of prayer and mortification; and, the more devoted one is, the more one progresses in both of these. There is a reciprocal relation between God and the soul which is devoted to him; for God takes care of the prayer, while the soul takes care of the mortification: not that he does not extend his hand, and co-operate with the soul in one as with the other; but prayer is principally the work of grace, and mortification the work of the will. Mortification of the flesh is indispensable for two great reasons. First, because the immoderate love of the flesh, the eager desire for sensual pleasures, and the fleeing from all suffering, are the source of an infinite number of sins; second, because the "carnal man understandeth not the things which belong to God," and has no relish for them. Therefore, when a man consecrates himself to God, the desire for exterior mortification is the first thing

which is awakened within him. Those who are indifferent or careless upon this point are not truly devoted. In the first fervor of devotion, one is apt to carry this to excess, and to go too far, unless restrained by the counsel of a wise director.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Mortification of the Will Essential to Devotion.

THE mortification of the will is much more important, more extended, and more difficult to practise, than that of the body. It knows no limits nor exceptions. We can never suspend it, and we need never fear that we can carry it too far. Were I to do nothing more than to explain here the many kinds of death through which the will must pass in order to be absolutely lost in the will of God, it would make a large volume. Suffice it to say, that these deaths are different, according to the designs of God upon the soul; and one can form little idea of it till he is in the furnace of trial. Remember that to be devoted is to be con-

secrated to God, to have no other will than his: and it is God alone who can know just how far this must extend; since, in consecrating himself, man surrenders his will, that God may dispose of him according to his own good pleasure. He must, therefore, resolve to die to himself, and to yield to God in all he may do or permit for the accomplishment of this end. Do not be alarmed, however, beforehand, nor give the reins to your imagination upon things which may never happen to you. Wait in peace till God manifests his design. Anticipate nothing, fear nothing, reject nothing, and choose nothing for yourself. Let him act. He is infinitely wise: he knows the most secret recesses of your will, and he knows how best to lead it to his own purposes. He will begin by easy ways, and will gradually come to things which will cost you more; and thus will lead you on, if he deems

it proper, to great sacrifices. But he will dispose all things with as much gentleness as strength, and will prepare your will in such a way that it will resist less and less, until at last it loses the power of resistance. All that you are able to give by your own consent, he will sweetly incline you to give; and what it would not be in your power to give, he will constrain you to let him take, by virtue of the absolute gift you have already made of yourself. Such is the way that God ordinarily pursues. He solicits of the soul a general and indistinct consent to all that he may be pleased to ordain. This consent once granted, he develops his private intentions, either by the events of his providence, and the unforeseen circumstances in which he places the soul, or by the temptations and trials to which he permits it to be exposed. He proportions his grace and help to every situation, and the soul has

nothing to do on its part but to yield accordingly to the will of God. It submits at first with reluctance, and after many struggles, then with promptness, and at last with joy. It continues until it no longer feels any interior resistance, till it desires nothing and fears nothing, and cherishes a holy indifference to every thing, provided only that the good pleasure of God may be accomplished. This is the highest degree of conformity. The will is not only united to God's will, but is one and the same with his will. Behold the limit of interior mortification, which is also that of devotion. If it tends not to this, it is either not devotion, or a very imperfect kind of devotion. Let us be humble; let us be confounded. Perhaps we fancy ourselves devoted, while as yet we have no true idea of devotion. "*Those who are Christ's,*" says St. Paul, "*have crucified the flesh.*" They have bound it to the cross, after the example

of their Master. Is our flesh crucified like that of Jesus Christ, — I do not mean in his passion, but in his earthly life? "*Those who belong to him*," says the same apostle, "*live not for themselves, but for him who died, and rose again for them.*" Are we among them? Are we striving to become one of them? Is Jesus Christ our life? Is his will our will? Do we conceive what it is to live, not for ourselves, and only for Christ? St. Ignatius, on going to his martyrdom, said, "I am just beginning to be a disciple of Christ." The love of his Master consumed him; he was inflamed with the desire of being crushed by the wild beasts; yet he dared not say, I am a disciple of Christ; only, I am beginning to be one. I am now only in the first stage; and what he said, he sincerely believed. But we think we do enough when we do no more than we are obliged to do for Christ: we fancy we are

touching perfection. Again I repeat, let us humiliate ourselves. The saints had a very different idea of devotion from that which we have. They did not consider themselves devoted. The word was repugnant to their humility. They endeavored to become so, they said: they were serving an apprenticeship, and this at the end of their career.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Various Qualities of Devotion.

DEVOTION is uniform and invariable. It is a permanent adhesion of the heart to God, independent of all the vicissitudes of the spiritual life. It is always the same, when the soul receives no consolation in the exercises of piety as when it does, in sorrow as in joy, in the storm of temptation as in the calm of peace, in the abandonment of God as well as in the grace of the most intimate union with him. In whatever manner God may treat me, says the devoted soul, he is always the same, and must always faithfully be served. My devotion must never swerve, because he is its object and is immutable. It is simple, and has only one inten-

tion. God only is its device. It studies to purify its motives, striving above all to regard only God and his will. It has no double thought for God and self also; but it sees itself in God, and in his good pleasure, which is all in all to it. It is fervent, always resolved to do and to suffer what God wills, whatever it may cost. Fervor of spirit is not those transports which produce in the soul a sensible joy. This is delusive: it leads one to think himself capable of every thing, and to ask God to put him to the test. But this sensible effect of grace has no sooner ceased, than he changes his idea and his language, and realizes all his weakness. True fervor dwells in the depth of the will, and it endures amid all weariness and sloth and dulness: still it maintains the same ardor, the same courage, the same activity. It is faithful, carrying attention and precision to an extreme delicacy, yet without scruple or anx-

iety. It is faithful in the least as well as in the greatest; faithful in that which is of perfection, as in that which is of obligation; faithful to the slightest indication as to the most direct command. The principle from which it never swerves is, that nothing is small in the service of so great a master, whose will alone gives things their value; and that we cannot manifest our love better than by anticipating his wishes, without waiting for a precise order. It is wise; always attentive to the leadings of the Holy Spirit; it is neither inconsiderate, nor indiscreet, nor excessive; the friend of order; doing every thing at a proper time, knowing when to be firm, and when to condescend to the weakness of others; exact in all its duties, or relaxing its regularity for a moment in favor of charity. It listens not to imagination, which is the peril of many pious people; which troubles and disconcerts, and forges for them

a thousand vain phantoms; induces them constantly to undertake a thing, and then to abandon it; and subjects them to many whims and caprices, to much lightness and inconstancy. It makes it a chief point to despise and overcome this: thereby it acquires a great peace; an equanimity of temper that is never disturbed; a serenity of soul which is reflected externally, and which preserves a happy countenance, even in the most trying situations.

CHAPTER XXV.

Other Qualities of Devotion.

DEVOTION is docile: it is not attached to its own ideas, and readily submits them to those who have authority over it; sacrificing to them even what they regard as a conviction and a persuasion; obeying them, though they feel the greatest repugnance; continuing no practice against their will, and changing nothing in their ordinary course of life without consulting them. It never judges itself, either adversely, lest it be discouraged, or favorably, lest it be presumptuous. It is equally on its guard against a false humility, which is never contented with its progress, and finds fault with all its actions; and against a false confidence, which ap-

proves of all it does, and easily presumes upon its own progress. It considers it more humble and more safe not to think about itself, nor to pronounce upon its own condition, but to submit to the judgment of those who have charge of its conduct, and to rely upon them with the same simplicity, whether they approve, or whether they condemn. True devotion is severe upon itself, but indulgent for others; accommodating itself to their weakness with prudence; taking upon itself whatever is most painful and difficult, and always carrying a greater burden than that which it imposes. It is active without haste, deliberate without slowness, grave without affectation, cheerful without levity. It is not finical, or scrupulous, or anxious, or stoical, or remiss, but holds a just mean, and inclines rather to the side of gentleness than of too exact a justice. Though zealous for good, and always ready

to undertake the good works for which Providence furnishes the occasion, it does not anticipate them: it waits. It does not propose, nor intermeddle, nor intrigue. It does not desire to be mixed up with every thing, and to take part in every thing, as if nothing could succeed unless it directs, and assumes the charge. It has nothing to do with the affairs of others; it does not inquire about them, nor look curiously upon them, nor pass judgment upon them: it enters into them only with the most careful consideration, when charity requires it; and then it takes the most active interest in their success, sparing neither trouble nor means nor credit, yet ready at any moment to withdraw, and preferring that this kind of work should pass into other hands than its own. Its zeal consists not in declaiming incessantly against abuses, even the most real. It complains to God, and implores him to put things in

order; it endures them, when not charged with correcting them; and, when it labors, it is with as much sweetness and patience as efficiency. It is too much occupied with its own defects, to stop and observe those of others: it either sees them not, or excuses them; or, if it cannot excuse them, it is silent, unless it speaks from a motive of charity, and for the good of the person interested. It is a declared enemy of what are called *coteries*, parties, cabals, and secret associations. It is not that it does not choose persons with whom it may unite in holy intercourse, and explain confidentially the things of God; but these unions are the work of grace; they are not affected nor mysterious; there is nothing in them to mark a contempt of others, as if they were unworthy of being admitted to their society. Still less does it form a faction to give popularity to a certain preacher or pastor, raising one

at the expense of another. This party spirit characterizes false devotion, and is the enemy of true devotion.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Devotion corrects and perfects the Character.

FROM what has been said, we see that one of the great objects of devotion is, to reform the character. It is this to which it first applies us; opening our eyes to the faults to which we are generally blind, awakening the desire to subdue them, the courage to attack them, and the hope of triumphing over them by the help of grace. Nobody ignores the fact, that his character is not so perfect as to be subject to no fault, and that the best natural qualities are akin to some vice. Sweetness degenerates into weakness, and gentle complaisance into indolence. Firmness exposes us to sternness, harshness, and obstinacy. The circumspect soul is

often cowardly, distrustful, and suspicious: the resolute soul, on the contrary, is enterprising, presumptuous, and rash. It is the same with other qualities, which are seldom pure, but which are mingled good and evil. Reason alone could never make a complete separation. It is not subtle enough to discern the delicate shades which distinguish the good and the evil qualities; not just enough to seize the mean between two extremes, or not sufficiently mistress of itself to abide by it constantly; still less is it able to reconcile and harmonize two good qualities, which appear to be opposed to each other. This can be only the work of grace, whose light is infinitely more penetrating and more certain, and which, in enlightening the mind, animates and sustains the will in the great work of self-reformation with which it is exercised. When I speak of reforming the natural character, it must not be supposed

that this means changing it to a different one. The foundation of every character is good; and the work of grace is not to change the foundation, but to eradicate the evil which self-love has added to it; to perfect whatever it has of good, and to operate so that every moral quality may lose whatever it has in excess, and may acquire whatever is wanting: thus there is a mutual adjustment, which results finally in perfect virtue. Moreover, devotion supernaturalizes the moral qualities, and communicates to them a divine afflatus, which ennobles and sanctifies them. It must be remembered, however, that the labor of man, however aided by grace, never carries on this work to the highest perfection: and in the holiest saints there still remains some fault or some excess which belongs to the original character; as may be observed in the writings of a St. Cyprian, a St. Jerome, and many others. But when God undertakes the

work by himself, with this intention, he takes possession of the soul, and puts it in the interior way. If this soul is faithful, habitual recollection, prayer, and trials radically purify it; and the character passes through the crucible, which leaves in it less and less alloy. This soul becomes like wax, moulded in the hands of a master workman, who manipulates it, and fashions it according to his will, and makes alterations as profound as they are delicate. In these characters what beautiful symmetry and harmony appear. Such were St. Augustine, and St. Francis de Sales. What sweet devotion was theirs! What charity! What uniformity! What admirable equanimity of soul in their life and conversation, as well as in their works!

CHAPTER XXVII.

Devotion, instead of repressing the Spirit, serves rather to develop it.

DEVOTION has been reproached as repressing the spirit, but those who make this reproach know nothing of it. They look at the littleness and the petty scrupulousness of certain devoted people, and throw back upon devotion the faults of those who conceive it wrongly and practise it badly. Take whatever man or woman you may, who regards and practises devotion as I have defined and explained it, and see if it has repressed their spirit. But what need of such examples? Are much reflection and reasoning necessary to convince one that devotion is the only source from which to draw all

true, grand, and right ideas of the things that are most interesting to man; which, to the knowledge furnished by pure and healthy reason, adds the clearer, the more certain, and the more sublime, light of revelation? There is nothing great but God, and God is truth. All truth emanates from God, love and life emanate from God, and tend towards and terminate in him. How, then, can a spirit be repressed in that which most concerns it, which relates to its duties, whose law is to consult God, to conform its ideas and judgments to the ideas and judgments of God? Is not God the Father of light? Is not the eternal Word "The true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"? Yet one fancies that a spirit which takes this Light for its rule and guide will become narrow and small! Is there an absurdity or contradiction equal to this? True devotion teaches us that which is to our

advantage, and which concerns our duties. There is no need that it should go farther. It is proportioned to the capacity of the simple and the ignorant, and it gives them all that is sufficient to lead them aright. The truly devoted, however great his natural gifts, and however highly educated he may be, always has more reason, more good sense, more penetration and justice, than he would otherwise have. This is unquestionable, and I will say no more about it. But if a man of great genius, cultivated by a fine education, gives himself up to a life of devotion; if in his meditations and studies he preserves a serenity of spirit, disengaged from all prejudices and passions, seeking truth only, and seeking it only in God, — I insist that he will penetrate its mysteries far beyond what the limits of his understanding would allow, that he will judge the most difficult and the most delicate things as

certainly as can possibly be expected of a reason which is not infallible, and that his talents will attain to the highest development of which they are susceptible. St. Augustine was truly devoted. He understood religion, and practised it thoroughly. Was his a narrow mind? Indeed, do we know of any one who had more breadth, more elevation, more profoundness? Would he have had views so grand, so just, so penetrating, if he had confined himself to the study of eloquence and profane philosophy? Consider what he has himself told us in his "Confessions." Until he was thirty years old he was engrossed in all kinds of science, and sought truth with an indefatigable zeal everywhere except in religion. Did he find it? Did his restless spirit find repose? Did he search it and develop it as he did afterwards, when, having given himself entirely to God, he knew no other book than the Holy Scriptures, and,

that he might understand them better, he implored divine help by constant prayer? St. John Chrysostom was devoted. Did his devotion do any injury to his great genius, his remarkable gift of eloquence? Did it not rather add to his nobleness of thought, his sound judgment, that profound philosophy, which we admire in his discourses, and for which he certainly was not indebted to the teaching of Libanius his master? Would he have become what he was if he had attached himself to that sophist, who destined him to be his successor, if, as he complained, the Christians had not carried him away? Compare the writings of each, and then decide. I could say the same of all the Fathers of the Church, who owe it to devotion, that they became the greatest spirits and the lights of their age. Devotion, then, does not repress the spirit; but, on the contrary, it gives to it all the breadth, all the solidity, all the sagacity,

of which it is capable. This will be perfectly obvious if we consider the nature of the objects proper to devotion, the light under which it presents other objects, the rules it gives by which to judge them, the means it employs, and the obstacles it removes. I except frivolous pursuits, and the knowledge of mere amusement, which it teaches us to despise, or, at least, to which it will not permit us to give much attention. Besides this, is there a single science, truly worthy of man, to which devotion, as I have defined it, may not be useful, or even necessary, in penetrating its true principles, and in tracing and developing its consequences? I leave this to the consideration of my readers. Let them explore philosophy and all its branches, logic, physics, metaphysics, morals, political and social economy, politics and jurisprudence, and then tell me if there is one of them that we can maintain and treat profoundly without

the science of religion for its base. History, what is it but an object of curiosity, a simple exercise of memory, if you detach it from Providence, which prepares events from the beginning, and permits and designs them for worthy ends? What other mind than that enlightened by a deep devotion would be able to unfold history, and show the intimate relation it has always had, and will always continue to have, with religion? If the great Bossuet had not been able to consider it in this way, would his "Discourse upon Universal History" be as sublime, as eloquent, as instructive, as it is. Would it be an intellectual masterpiece as well for its plan as for its execution? If one calls the truly devoted man a mean spirit, because he loves God and fears to offend him; because he respects the Church, its ministers, its commands, its decisions; because he is scrupulous and delicate in the management of his affairs, and

the means of making a fortune ; because he cultivates piety, virtue, and honesty, — I have nothing more to say. I cannot prevent those who have a personal interest for doing so from calling black white, and white black.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Devotion elevates the Heart of Man above Every Thing which is not of God.

THE same devotion which enlarges and purifies the mind enriches the heart and elevates the affections. This statement requires no more proof than the preceding one. That which represses and debases the heart is self-love, passion, and the esteem and love of earthly things. Seek no other cause of hardness, meanness, injustice, and cruelty, than the egotism by which one wishes every thing for himself, traces every thing to himself, and endeavors to concentrate every thing within himself. You cannot mention one single vice, nor one single defect, that does not spring from this root. At what

does devotion aim, and what is its motive? To attack self-love at its foundation, and pursue it to its entire extinction; substituting in its place the love of God, of one's neighbor, and the legitimate love of self; thereby to re-establish the heart in its primitive rectitude, to restore order to its affections, to allow in it no sentiment which comes not from God, and which tends not toward God; to communicate to the individual largeness, which, drawing him out from himself, extends his benevolence to all men; to interest him, by views superior to those of humanity, in the happiness and the unhappiness of his race; to lead him to solace their miseries, and to promote their interests as if they were his own; to inspire him with a noble disinterestedness, a modest and compassionate generosity, unknown to that fastidious beneficence which is always preceded, accompanied, and followed by itself, — in short, to develop

all the capacity he has received from his Creator, and which can only be filled by the divine immensity. What further aim has devotion? To turn the human passions, which wrangle, which envy, which contend together for frivolous and miserable pleasures, to their true objects, which alone can satisfy them, and which all may possess in common; to teach them neither to love, nor hate, nor desire, nor fear any thing except what God and right reason require that man should love, hate, fear, and desire; an immediate aim and a motive, which, faithfully practised, will banish from the world every species of crime, and will dry up its source in the human heart. What is indeed its final aim? To inspire us with disgust and contempt for the things of this world; to show us their true design, which is to provide for the passing needs of this mortal life; to convince us that they are made for us, but only for the smallest part of us,

and that our souls are not made for them; to present to the soul the substantial, eternal, immutable things worthy of its nature, and proportioned to its desire; to give to it a taste for these things, to inspire it with an ardent desire for their possession, and to teach it the means by which to attain them. What grandeur, what nobleness, what elevation of thought, there is in him whose devotion to God is penetrated with these truths! and this is the same, whatever may be his state and condition in this world; for, in this respect, devotion renders all conditions equal: and the peasant in his hut is greater than the monarch in his palace if he has the greater piety. Honors and dignities do not elate him, obscurity and dependence do not degrade him. He is neither insolent in prosperity, nor despondent in adversity, nor proud and contemptuous like the philosopher in mediocrity. If, in his position, he is above other

men, he regards them as equals, to whom he owes health and protection. He considers himself below all who serve God better than he does; and, because there is not one who is not or can not be greater than he before God, he puts himself in the lowest place in his heart. If he is in an obscure condition, instead of envying those who are raised above him, he congratulates them, and thanks God. We have seen this in our day; and this grandeur of soul, for those who can appreciate it, is not one of the least triumphs of devotion. If he has masters, it is God whom he respects, loves, and obeys in them; and their service has nothing debasing in his eyes. In a word, he who has a really great heart, which is above all created things, and acknowledges no superior but God, is truly devoted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

True Devotion regards Every Thing in Relation to Eternity and to the Will of God.

IT seems as if there could be nothing more wanting to this portrait of devotion, and it immeasurably surpasses the idea of it with which we began. Still, there are a few more features to be added. The truly devoted is one who belongs not to time. From the moment that he consecrates himself to God, he is transported into the region of eternity; he thinks only of eternity, not with fear, but with joy, as his destination; he regards every thing in the light of eternity; he utters to himself incessantly these words of a saint: "What has this to do with eternity? Of what importance to me is all this

which is passing? I am in the world only as in a place of probation. I am here just to serve an apprenticeship in that which I am to do eternally. I am destined to love God, and to be happy forever in the possession of him. This is the end of my being. The few and the uncertain number of the days allotted me on earth are granted me in order that I may love God by choice, and may be entitled to the eternal reward as the merit of loving him. Every thing here below must be for me an exercise of love. But love aspires only to give, to sacrifice, to suffer for that which it loves; to immolate itself at its own good pleasure. This is all I have to do: this is the employment of every moment of my life. He whom I love merits every thing, and expects every thing, from me. He has loved me with an eternal love, with a love gratuitous and disinterested, with a love to which mine, whatever may be its excess, can

never approach. For the reward of his love he demands mine; and though he should not have prepossessed me, though he should promise me nothing, I should still have a thousand reasons for loving him." The will of God is the only rule for the truly devoted. In all that happens to him, he sees only that; he attaches himself only to that; he blesses that for every thing, always contented provided that is accomplished. He is confidently persuaded that God wills nothing and permits nothing that will not turn to the advantage of those who love him. Every thing which comes from his hand — and every thing except sin comes from him — is a benefit to him; and crosses more than all the rest, because of the resemblance they give to Jesus Christ, the chief and the model of souls devoted to God. Every thing serves to unite him more and more to him whom he loves: obstacles are transformed to means. Nothing arrests him;

he surmounts every thing; he compels every thing; he removes every thing which would prevent him from joining himself immediately to him, mind to mind, heart to heart. Divine union is the end of all his actions, the centre of all his desires. And every thing he loves, he loves only in God and for God. Let no one think, as many falsely imagine, that, on account of this, his heart is indifferent and insensible; for no one is more affectionate, more tender, more compassionate, more generous, more grateful, than he who is truly devoted. His love for his neighbor is modelled after the infinite love of God, and is only an extension of that he feels for him. Love for his neighbor is a substantial love, a delicate love, an exceeding love, which nothing can weaken, which is rather increased by that which would seem as if it ought to extinguish it, — that which does not prevent in a very just sense that God should be every thing to him, and

all the rest as it were nothing; because God is his only good, and the limit of his affections, which pass by creatures, only to fasten themselves on him.

CHAPTER XXX.

Conduct of the Truly Devoted with Regard to his Neighbor.

LET us look more particularly at the conduct which devotion inspires towards one's neighbor; because this is the point upon which it is most unjustly attacked, and it is necessary to defend it from the malignity of its accusers. I assert, then, that, in regard to one's neighbor, devotion has all the characteristics which St. Paul attributes to charity: indeed, it is nothing else but the exercise of the purest charity.

Follow me now in the development of these characteristics, apply them to the devoted whom you know, and render justice to those in whom they shine, notwithstanding the

shadows mingled there from human weakness. Thus the truly devoted is patient: he suffereth all things, he endureth all things, from his neighbor. This forbearance is one of the most important things in the intercourse of life, and that in which one is most exercised; because it is continual, and contributes more than any thing else to the maintenance of domestic peace. It is in the interior of families, and in relation to those with whom we live habitually, that we have the most need of it; husband and wife with regard to each other; a master with regard to his servants; parents with regard to their children; and, in general, those who live together, or who are in close connection, — all are in circumstances which try their dispositions; and they show themselves just as they are, yielding to temper and a thousand little natural defects. Doubtless it is easier to preserve patience on great occasions, when

religious motives sustain us, and when the fear of offending God puts us upon our guard, than not to forget one's self, and to manifest nothing, either in word or manner, in the many light encounters which are constantly recurring, against which we have not taken careful precaution, and in which our faults do not necessarily appear. The want of forbearance sometimes has sad consequences. Imagination is kindled, and magnifies some little thing into a great defect; anger is roused, simple repugnance passes into aversion; we can neither look at nor tolerate each other; we disagree about every thing; unkind words proceed to a declared enmity. In the beginning the thing was nothing: in the end the evil becomes extreme and incurable. It is just here that the practice of devotion is of great importance, teaching us to bear the infirmities of others as we wish that they should bear with ours.

The devoted, like charity, is full of kindness, always inclined to oblige. His wealth, his time, his talents, his credit, are less to him than to others. At whatever moment they take him, whatever service they demand of him, if it be in his power he is disposed to render it: he leaves every thing, he sacrifices even his devotions, when the interest of his neighbor requires it. He knows nothing of those vain offers, those excuses and evasions, so customary in the world, where, provided it costs nothing, one makes a show of good will, and seeks to impose upon others by the appearance of it. His offers are sincere: he is a slave to his promises; and, when he does excuse himself, it is in such a way as to make one feel that it is really painful to him not to be able to grant the desired favor. It is of him alone that we can say, he "envieth not:" he sees the prosperity of another with as much or even more pleasure than his own.

He envies neither the talents nor the success of others, neither the applause nor the rewards they receive. How should he envy them that for which he has no desire? But he is the first to recognize their merit, to praise it, to show it forth, to establish it. He is not even jealous of their virtue, their sanctity, or the graces God has given them; though these are the only things to which he aspires: and, whatever desire he may have to love God, he is willing that others should exceed him in love. How rare it is to be entirely exempt from this sentiment, so low, yet so natural to man, from which devotion alone can set him free! He says nothing, he does nothing, *malapropos*. "Charity doth not behave it unseemly," — lightly, inconsiderately, which is so important, and the opposite of which has such serious consequences in society. On this point, devotion is far superior to politeness, which regards

only the outside; for it extends this rule to the judgment, and the affections, from which external demonstrations proceed, of which we do not always have control unless we observe what passes within. "Charity vaunteth not itself." Instead of boasting of the temporal or spiritual advantages he has over others, the truly devoted pays no attention to them; or, if he thinks of them at all, it is only to find in them cause for humiliation: while, on the contrary, he who deludes himself with the idea that he is devoted, is ever secretly drawing a comparison of himself with others, giving himself the preference, and congratulating himself, like the Pharisee (Luke xviii. 11), that he is not as other men. But the devoted seeks only self-forgetfulness; and his judgment of himself tends to self-abasement, which is his own deep conviction. "Charity is not puffed up." Nobody is farther removed from ambition than is the devoted.

As others are flattered by distinctions and preferments, he has rather an aversion to them. He thinks so little of elevating himself above others, of being placed over them to command them, that, on the contrary, he prefers to be abased, to choose the lowest places, — prefers only to obey. He is still more exempt from spiritual ambition; knowing that it is more dangerous, and more odious to God and man. "Charity seeketh not her own." So the truly devoted is always ready to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of peace, and to preserve charity. His great, his only interest is to live well with man in the sight of God. He has nothing to do with excitement, with angry words, or with an obstinate temper. Sweetness marks all his conversation, and rules in all his actions. He would rather yield, even when he is right, than maintain his opinion with any bitterness. Nothing wounds him, noth-

ing offends him, nothing irritates him. One might fancy that he was insensible, and that he perceived nothing; yet he has the most delicate feeling, and nothing wrong escapes him. "Charity thinketh no evil." While he who falsely persuades himself that he is devoted, is scandalized at every thing, and gives a bad turn to every thing, the truly devoted interprets every thing favorably, putting his whole mind to see and present things on the good side; to diminish positive wrongs, and to justify the intention, when the action cannot be excused. As he has no malice himself, he suspects none in others; and he will not believe evil until forced to do so by unquestionable evidence.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The Difference between the Politeness of the World and the Cordiality of True Devotion.

THE politeness of the world is only dissimulation. It manifests esteem and friendship, the better to conceal its coldness or its contempt. The truly devoted loves "without dissimulation" (Rom. xii. 9). He shows in his face what he has in his soul: his lips express only what he feels. His characteristic is cordiality, a virtue most precious, which the world has banished from its intercourse, though it preserves its semblance. He does not expect that any one should let him be first; but he gives others precedence to do them honor, according to the words of

St. Paul, "in honor preferring one another." He forgets the respect which is due him, and thinks only of that which charity dictates that he should have towards his neighbor. It is not that he cannot maintain his dignity when necessary, and preserve the rights of his rank: but he never asserts them with haughtiness or pretension, or excessive delicacy; and, on this account, one is less inclined to dispute his merits. Politeness gives only to receive. It makes advances at one time in order that they may be returned at another time. It measures, it considers, its own civilities; and it demands at least as much attention as it pays; always fearing that one may not appreciate, or not sufficiently realize, the value of what it does. It is not thus with devotion. Without derogating aught from that which belongs to place and condition, it can be affable, gracious, obliging: it humanizes, becomes familiar with, remembers, and puts itself on

a level with, those with whom it converses. Its demonstrations are frank, natural, disinterested, without any thought of return. Human compassion often has nothing but words, or, at most, barren sentiments. It is partial, inconstant, moves quickly at first, and is soon exhausted. Sometimes the evils it beholds, by their very excess inspire it with horror rather than pity; and, if it relieves them at all, it is with indignation of heart, and averted look. Too frequently the humanity on which it prides itself is affected. It acts with ostentation; does good only for applause; and, in bringing to light the secret misery of another, causes him to repent that he had trusted to it. Devotion does not fall into any such errors. Its commiseration extends to all the unfortunate: it sympathizes heartily with their misfortunes, and ministers to their necessities as if they were its own. It relieves them effectually, drawing, not merely from its su-

perfluities, but from its necessities. No kind of misery repels it, and the more extreme the misery the more eager it is to succor it. It accompanies its charities with an air of interest, of sensibility, of tenderness, which touches, which consoles, which gladdens, the afflicted. Full of pity for degraded indigence, it divines it, spares it the shame of explaining, often lets it remain ignorant of the hand which assists it, and does it so secretly that nobody suspects it, and never a word escapes concerning it. Charity often gives to the truly devoted the interior dispositions of his neighbor. The devoted one rejoices, according to the counsel of the apostle, with those who rejoice, and weeps with those who weep. He shares the feelings of those who approach him, and is affected by all that touches them. This is neither deceit, nor flattery, nor simple politeness : it is the true and profound interest of a brother, who

shares the good and the evil of his brothers, and regards them as his own. Finally, if we consider, on the one hand, what humanity, education, and politeness may do for usefulness, safety, pleasure, and harmony in the intercourse of life, and, on the other hand, what devotion, well understood and well practised, does, and what it might do if it were more generally diffused, we shall be compelled to admit, that it has all the advantage, and that there is no comparison between them. It is to the truly devoted that the commendation of the wise man applies: he is beloved of God and of man, because he serves God in God, and does to man all the good that lies in his power; and, if he is not always beloved by them, it is because they are wicked, envious, and ungrateful; because they despise virtue, and do not render him justice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

The truly Devoted possess all Civil Qualities.

IF the devoted man is what he ought to be, he is a good husband, a good father, a good master, a good friend, a good citizen, a good subject; because the very essentials of devotion consist in fulfilling all the duties attached to these several spheres, and to all others of like nature. There is no case in which it authorizes any one to fail in the least obligation which results from the civil or natural relations of society, or in which it does not severely condemn those who fail in such obligations. Further, it alone discloses all the extent of these duties, obliges us in conscience to study them, and makes us take interest and pleasure in acquitting ourselves

in regard to them, at all times and in all circumstances. All things else being equal, compare, in every state and every profession, the devoted man with him who is not so. See which is the more learned, the more assiduous, the more honest, the more exact, the more delicate, the more disinterested; which is it who succeeds better, of whom the public complains the less, and who is the more contented. Glance over the high places; examine without partiality by whom they have been the better filled, — by the friends or the enemies of devotion. One may be devoted, and fail in talents; but he will not be wanting in zeal, in honesty, or in love for the right. The faults occasioned by a want of genius should not be imputed to devotion; since it never inclines us to undertake a commission, an employment, a profession, for which we are not fitted: and it requires us to neglect nothing that may

render us capable of any duties we may be called on to perform, and to resign all such duties and employments, if public and private interests should suffer by our exercise of them. Fraud, misdemeanors, injustice, violence, abuse of authority, negligence, faults in work, and all the results of a culpable ignorance, never proceed from devotion. All good may be put to its account: all evil is foreign to it, and it is unjust to hold it in any way responsible for evil. Such is, in full, what the truly devoted is in his relations to his neighbor and to society.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The truly Devoted Man possesses the only True Happiness that one can experience on Earth.

SO far as it regards him personally, devotion blesses the truly devoted with the only true happiness to be found on earth; and it has never happened that any devoted man has had any cause to repent his being such, and it never will happen. One will tell me that he hates and despises himself, combats with himself, and practises self-abnegation. I grant it; but it is in this he finds peace, equanimity, and joy of soul. It is fixed by reason and the principles of faith, and demonstrated by constant and universal experience, that the good of this world, its riches, honors, and pleasures, cannot satisfy

the soul, and only aggravate its hunger without ever appeasing it; that the passions are the principal source of the misfortunes which overwhelm mankind; and that, for the inevitable evils of this life, no other philosophy than that of religion can help us to bear them, or teach us their true use. Again, it is fixed and demonstrated by experience, that God, being man's only good, devotion, which brings him back to God, and tends to unite him to God, is the true, the only principle of his happiness; that it restrains him from sin, which is his sovereign evil; that it secures him from misfortunes, which are the fruits of his own passions. With regard to other evils, whether natural, or caused by the injustice and malice of man, it teaches him to rise above them by patience, and to draw from them marvellous benefits: with regard to temptations, trials, and other spiritual difficulties, it persuades him that these are not evils, but

real blessings, — remedies which lead him to a higher life, occasions of practising virtue, means of sanctifying him, and disposing him to a divine union. Thus it elevates him above all human accidents, above the vicissitudes of the spiritual life, above himself even, and establishes him in an unalterable peace. On the other hand, God, who is rich in mercy, and whose liberality is never weary, devotes himself, if I may venture to speak thus, to those who are devoted to him; he treats them as his children; he guards them as "the apple of his eye," — this is his own expression (Zech. ii. 8.) He lavishes upon them his aid, his consolations, his favors: in a word, he applies himself to convince them by the strongest and the most undoubted evidence, that they gain every thing by sacrificing every thing to him, and that the highest happiness of the creature is found only in the loss of himself and of every other

earthly blessing, and in the assurance of the possession of the Infinite. Do not accuse me here of falsehood or of exaggeration. On the contrary, believe that what I say is below the reality. You have also the unanimous testimony of the saints: refer to them. You have their writings: consult them, and see if they say any less than I have said. There is not one among them who has not asserted that he was happy in the service of God, that he had never been happy before, and that this is the only means of being so. If you say that you have not tasted this happiness, although you have served him for many years, it is because you have not served him with the same devotion as the saints; because there has entered into your devotion much negligence, much carelessness, much reserve; because you have sought yourself instead of seeking God; and because self-love has tyrannized over your soul by fear,

by desire, by vain regrets and idle forebodings, by murmurs and internal revolts, and by resistance to the reign of the love of God within you.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Jesus Christ the Great Model of Perfect Devotion.

YOU ask me for a model of perfect devotion. What other can I propose than that which has been given us in the person of Jesus Christ? Listen to this divine Master: study his life. He came into this world, only to teach you in what true devotion consists. All the lessons of his heavenly doctrine are reduced to the one lesson of devotion. His whole life was only the most absolute devotion, practised in the most excellent manner. From the moment he entered the world, he devoted himself to God as the victim to atone for the outrages committed against his glory, and to reconcile mankind

to him. At that moment the great cross he was to carry was offered to him: that cross embraces all the events of his life, and it daily became harder and heavier from the cradle to his latest breath. It combined to an incomprehensible degree every kind of suffering and opprobrium which could be borne by a soul sustained by all the power of the Divinity. It was to exhaust upon him the scourge of divine justice: it was to equal and surpass all the pains due to the enormous and innumerable iniquities of man. His soul, infinitely enlightened by divine light, measured the extent of this cross; knew perfectly all its rigors; foresaw, and experienced beforehand, its unutterable torments. Yet he accepted it with all the submission, all the love, all the generosity, of which the God-man was capable. It was always present to his mind: it was always dear to his heart. He continually hastened by his desire the

consummation of his sacrifice: and the extreme vehemence of his desire was, perhaps, the greatest of his torments; for whatever might be its excess, his love reached incomparably beyond it, and made him wish to suffer still more, if it were possible, for the glory of his Father and for our salvation. Behold the sublime, the divine model of devotion! See the only perfect and true expression of what God merits on our part, and of the service we owe him. It is only in view of this wonderful devotion that he can be satisfied with ours, so feeble, so imperfect, so unworthy of his supreme majesty. Our devotion, though it may be carried to the highest point that we can conceive, is in itself of no value. It is insufficient to expiate the smallest of our offences, or to merit for us the very least degree of glory. There has never been but one single devotion acceptable to God of itself, — that of Jesus Christ.

He accepts only that: he regards only that, from which ours derives all its value. Look, then, at this perfect, this unique model, and place first before your mind this great truth, that God is so infinitely above us, or, rather, that God is so every thing, and we so nothing, that it is impossible for us, by the highest and most generous devotion which we can imagine, not only to attain to that which he has a right to expect of us, but to do any thing to merit his slightest regard, or to render us worthy of any manifestation of his favor. Let us, therefore, profoundly humiliate and abase ourselves, and pray him to inspire in us some act of devotion that he will deign to accept, and to help us perform this act with all the love which the heart of man can possibly conceive, and to support us, by the power of his grace, in the faithful and constant accomplishment of every sacrifice which it may involve. Finally, because we are noth-

ing of ourselves, and are perverted by our will, and there is nothing good in us which is not a gift from God, let us unite our devotion to that of Jesus Christ, imploring our divine Saviour to communicate to it some portion of his merits, to present it to his Father with his own, and to prevail upon him by his own all-powerful mediation to accept it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Three Effectual Means to acquire True Devotion.

DOUBTLESS the essential point is rightly to conceive the act of devotion, and to form it in the heart with a full and entire will: it is to understand the nature and the qualities of our engagement with God, and heartily to embrace all its obligations. One may well say here, that the beginning is half the battle. But it is only the half: it must be carried to its execution. Perhaps you will wish to know by what means. This question I will not here answer in full. It will be the subject of another work to follow after this, under the title of "Spiritual Maxims," where I hope to say enough to put

beginners on the way; but I propose here three general means which will lead those who observe them very far. The first is, that one should always have his devotion present to his mind, as did Jesus Christ. The moment when one devotes himself, whether in prayer or at communion, is a moment of fervor, and of strong and sensible grace. Then is the soul, as it were, taken out of itself, and transported to God. But this moment passes quickly; fervor declines; the sensible impression of grace vanishes; the soul returns to itself, and to its ordinary condition. A thousand inevitable cares which distract it will make it lose sight of the vows it has just taken, unless it is careful to recall them often, to renew them, and to render the recollection habitual. This recollection awakens it, sustains it, animates its languor, excites its courage, shames its sloth, and is both a curb to check it, and a spear to urge

it forward. The second means is, to conform in every thing to the example of Christ; since a person devoted to God, that is to say, no longer at his own disposal, should not form any opinions or projects of his own will, but leave himself entirely in the hands of God; undertaking nothing, except by the inspiration of his grace, — as God never fails to make known his will to a soul determined to accomplish it; allowing in himself neither the fear nor the desire of other objects than those which belong to his devotion; ever fearing that which may draw him away from it, and ardently desiring to be faithful; regarding himself henceforth as being under the special guidance of Providence; abandoning to God the care of his interior spirit, without anxiety, without reflecting too much upon his state, without curiously seeking the reasons of that which happens; receiving with an equal gratitude that which consoles,

and that which afflicts, that which troubles, and that which tranquillizes, that which is contrary, and that which is agreeable to us, that which humiliates, and that which elevates us; to believe unhesitatingly that God has only our good in view, and that, if we hold ourselves attached to his will, the things apparently the most adverse will result to our advantage. It is not the work of a day, but that of a whole life, thus to exercise one's self in all events, whether temporal or spiritual. One must be a long time an apprentice in this science before becoming its master; and one becomes skilful, only after repeated failures, by which he is humiliated and corrected: but it is indispensable to enter at once into this general disposition, without which there can be no practice in devotion. The third means is, to have one's eyes always fixed upon Jesus Christ; to copy him, to express him, in our external and inter-

nal conduct; to entreat him to impress his own image on our likeness; and to hold ourselves under his hand as an immovable and well-prepared canvas, ready to receive all the features of this adorable original. For it is Christ himself who works upon our souls, who draws thereupon his own portrait, to which he adds at last the most delicate colors, and the finest touches of his pencil, when we place no obstacle in his way. As God has made the material world by his Son, so also has he made by him the spiritual and the supernatural world; and this world becomes such as it ought to be, only as it the more nearly resembles Christ. The saints of the Old Testament have symbolized it; those of the New have no other model: and when all the features of the God-man shall have been imprinted upon his elect, according to the design of the Eternal Father, the universe will be finished; as said St. Paul (Rom. viii.

29), "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Reflections upon the Characteristics of True Devotion.

IF devotion to God by Jesus Christ is the first duty of all who bear the Christian name, how much greater is it in those whose office it is to preach it to others, to teach the practice of it, and to give an example of it, and especially in those whom God has withdrawn from the distinction of the world that they may devote themselves more entirely to him. Yet, do we find many truly devoted in the ecclesiastical and in the religious life? With sorrow I confess they are as few as the ears of corn that escape the scythe of the mower, or the grapes that remain after the vintage. What, then, is the good soil in which

this seed shall be sown, and bear fruit? God knows, and it is for this that he has led me to write. Those souls will receive, will understand, and will practise it. As for others, I hear them already exclaim, and complain that I carry things too far; that I demand too much, and there is no means of being as devoted as I require. But is it I who wish this? Is it not the very nature of the thing? Reason as much as you please about devotion, modify it, temper it, soften it as much as you can, you will never be able to harmonize grace and nature, God and the world, the love of God and self-love; and, as far as this agreement is impossible, I am right. I have required only what is just, indeed only what is necessary. Have I exaggerated things? In what? In qualifying the meaning of devotion? But I have only given its literal meaning. Is it in attaching myself to the idea of devotion? On what other idea, then,

could I rest my book? Am I wrong in asserting that the devotion which has God for its object must be interior, without reserve, without division; that it must spring from love, inspire confidence, and dispose to self-surrender, must be humble, mortified, and the rest that one remembers? Have I said too much? Have I even said all upon these characteristics? Or if by a culpable treatment I had weakened the truth, would not those who accuse me of exaggerating it be the first to cry out against my carelessness? Would I have said less if I had entitled my work, Characteristics of True Love, and so, developing the two great precepts of love to God and love to one's neighbor, on which hang all the law and the prophets, had applied to them all that I have attributed to devotion? Would I have said less, if speaking to the disciples of Christ, and addressing to them his own words, I had interpreted

his teaching and his doctrine according to the idea of the apostles, and the Fathers of the Church? or, if, proposing Christ to them as a model, I had strongly represented the indispensable necessity of imitating his interior disposition, both toward God and man, and the virtues which shone out through all his life from the manger to the cross? Would I have said less if I had placed before them the example of the first Christians, our fathers in the faith, and if I had demanded, that, having the same duties and the same obligations, they should hold the same sentiments, the same conduct, the same devotion? Do not tell me that the circumstances are not the same. It would be easy for me to prove that the present circumstances are more delicate, and more dangerous to salvation. In conclusion, I could not say less without betraying the cause of God; and no one can do less without injuring the dearest interests

of his soul. It is a question concerning the glory of God, for which we were created; the eternal happiness to which we are called, and also our present happiness. These are worth the trouble of being carefully considered and wisely decided.